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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000486

SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: STATUS OF ELECTORAL PREPARATIONS

REF: ABIDJAN 337

Classified By: Pol/Econ Section Chief Silvia Eiriz for reasons 1.4 (b/d
) .

¶1. (SBU) The Government of Cote d'Ivoire has made some progress on its preparations for the presidential election scheduled for November 30. However, much work remains to be done. Many Ivoirians, as well as members of the international community, are beginning to question whether the government will be able to adhere to the November 30 date due to technical delays. This message reviews the status of preparations as of mid-July. End Summary.

Birth Documentation

¶2. (U) The Ouagadougou Political Agreement (OPA) provides that in order to register to vote, Ivoirians must present a birth certificate or a declaratory judgment ("jugement supplétif"). Since many lack such documentation, the OPA provided for the "audiences foraines," mobile tribunals issuing declaratory judgments to persons over the age of 13 whose birth had never been registered. The "audiences foraines" process lasted from September 25, 2007 to May 15, ¶2008. In general, the system functioned well and was accepted by all political parties. The Ministry of Justice will send out 50 additional mobile courts that will each work for a period of 15 days in locations that were not adequately covered and which will be determined based on recommendations from local officials. The Ministry of Justice told Embassy on July 18 that no date has yet been set for the deployment of these 50 tribunals.

¶3. (U) The OPA provides that concurrently with the "audiences foraines," destroyed or lost civil registries will be reconstituted so that persons who had birth certificates but lost them can obtain replacements. This process began the week of May 19, 2008 and is scheduled to be completed by the beginning of October.

Staff

¶4. (C) According to the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), 392 out of a total of 415 local CEI offices have been established and are staffed. A United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) officer told Poloff that UNOCI provided the transport necessary to make this happen. A staff of 35,000 is needed to conduct identification/voter registration (17,000 to be recruited by CEI; 6,000 by the National Institute of Statistics (INS); 6,000 by Sagem, and 6,000 by the National Office of Identification (ONI)). CEI Permanent Secretary Auguste Miremont told Poloff July 21 that the selection of this personnel is ongoing and should be completed by the first week of August. In addition, 66,000 persons must be hired to staff the polling stations. When Poloff asked Miremont when the hiring of that personnel would begin, he responded that one "shouldn't put the cart before

the horse."

Sites

15. (C) Eleven thousand voter registration stations (that will also serve as polling sites) must be set up throughout the country as well as 70 "coordination centers" where the results of the data gathered at the 11,000 sites will be pulled together. In addition, 1 central site needs to be established to compile the data from the 70 coordination centers. None of the 70 coordination center sites are ready and neither is the central site; however, Miremont told Poloff that rehabilitation of the sites is underway. (Note: During a recent visit to Bouake, DCM raised issue of voting locations and readiness with UNOCI officials. UNOCI election officer commented that the sites included not only schools, but also prisons and residences of village chiefs, remarking that many of these were inappropriate. He added that these were many of the same sites used in the 2000 election. End Note.) A Sagem representative told Poloff that Sagem provided CEI with a 200-page report the week of July 4 laying out the rehabilitation measures that need to be carried out at each site to allow Sagem to begin its work. According to Sagem, CEI agreed to a UNOCI offer to rehabilitate the central site. Miremont confirmed UNOCI's offer, but added that he believed the government would have to finance the rehabilitation of the other locations.

Sagem Remains Handicapped

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16. (C) It is troubling that Sagem has yet to begin its real work. It still has not imported the necessary equipment ("kits") because it has no secure facilities in which to store them due to the unavailability of the sites. The Sagem representative commented that Sagem cannot train staff if it has no location in which to conduct the training, explaining that it planned to use the central site for this purpose. Further, the Ivorian Government owes Sagem an outstanding payment of USD 114 million (47 billion CFA), although Sagem is not waiting for this final payment to start its work.

Voter Cards and Ballots

17. (U) Comment. The delay in the commencement of the voter registration process raises the question of whether the CEI will be able to publish the draft electoral list by the August 30 date required by the electoral code. The voter registration cards, estimated to number about 8 to 9 million, also need to be printed up and distributed by CEI and the electoral material needs to be transported to all 22,000 voting stations. There is also much discord over the security situation and people's ability to vote - especially in certain "hot spots" - without feeling threatened. End Comment.
AKUETTEH